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SAUL OF TARSUS

BY ELLWOOD HENDRICK

THIS essay is not written for good churchmen, whether they be of one denomination or another. If you go to church with diligence, and like it, and believe in the organization as it is, I can see no profit for you in these comments, for they are likely either to make you angry or to make you pity my ignorance. If you insist upon reading it, I commend to you the latter alternative, because if you grow angry, while it may do me no harm, it is very likely to injure you. And it would be unchristian. This is written by one who has great reverence and love for the life and words of Jesus, but to whom Christian dogma, as presented in the so-called Apostles' Creed, or with all the particulars and specifications of the Athanasian Creed, is unbelievable. It is designed for the unelect by one of themselves, yet in the belief that, if the world were to follow the advice of Jesus, the Kingdom of God would be at hand.

We have heard and read many discussions about why one should go to church, whether he should go or not, what the trouble is with the churches, and why people stay away from them. One claims that the churches are too orthodox, while another holds that if rigid orthodoxy be maintained the whole world will in time become wise and enlightened, and we shall all become Christians of one sort or another.

In all of these discussions I think we have failed to determine the crux of orthodoxy, and I shall make bold to suggest that this is Saul of Tarsus whom we know as Paul. The orthodox are followers of Paul; the unorthodox are not. And I shall go further than this, and say that it is Paul who keeps us apart, and who is the author of what many earnest Christians are seeking to rid themselves to-day.

We must remember that Jesus preached a very simple gospel, which anyone can understand. The substance of

it is that we must keep love in our hearts; that anger and hatred and malice and revenge are all danger signals of that which is not of the Kingdom of God. So long as we keep love in our hearts we cannot go entirely astray, no matter what happens to us. The Jews, among whom he lived, were very like the orthodox Christians of our day: they had traditions and rites, and rules and regulations determined by priests and elders that offered a whole series of substitutes for righteousness. They were always making definitions and determining what was right and what was wrong, according to law. They did not look ahead, except for more power; they looked backward, and their business was to conserve the great treasures of wisdom that had been handed down to them by Moses and the prophets; and their noblest work was to interpret them.

What happened to Jesus when he went off into the wilderness we do not know, but he seems to have come back with the idea that as for the tradition among the Jews that someone should arise among them or come to them with a message that should establish the Kingdom of God, he had that message. It was a very simple one of love and forgiveness. He clung to it all through his life. He strove to make those who believed in it a colony so inspired by love and good-fellowship that all the rest of the world would see the folly of pride and self-seeking and join in a real Kingdom of God, Jews and Gentiles all. This was his ideal: very simple, very beautiful, and yet very difficult of attainment. In all the centuries that have passed since then, no thought so lovely has been given us. He would define nothing, determine nothing, establish nothing, and preach nothing except his one gospel of love. Judges, lawyers, pettifoggers, priests, elders,—all sorts of people tried to induce him to commit himself on one question or another, but they never succeeded. He would not dogmatize. If you have love in your heart, he held that you may be trusted to find answers to questions of conduct as they arise; without it neither laws nor rules can guide you.

Keeping the Sabbath, making offerings and sacrifices as prescribed, and all the whole list of rules and laws were as nothing without this one enlivening gospel of love. The only prejudice he appeared to have was against wealth, and it would seem that this was rather against the arrogance of wealth than a desire to inventory men's goods and fix

a minimum. The Romans of his day were in some respects like the French under Napoleon, or the English people of forty years ago, or the Americans of the United States right after the Spanish War, or like the Germans just before the present war: a people fundamentally good, but maddened by success and boastful almost beyond endurance. Wealth threw men off their balance then as it does now with those not equipped to bear the strain; and it probably made many just such useless wastrels of women as it does to-day. It may be that we should gain wisdom by following him in this respect, and it surely would do us no harm to relax somewhat in our chase after wealth and our love for it. A certain young man was told to sell all that he had and give the proceeds to the poor, probably for good and sufficient reasons. But Joseph of Arimathea was another rich man, and for aught we know he kept his fortune all his life, with no harm to himself and to the good of his fellows. At all events, it is not of record that he was instructed to dispose of it. Jesus was not an economist, he did not claim to be one, and he would not be drawn into questions of economics or politics. He had a philosophy of life which was all-sufficient and basic: granted that in full operation, and humanity would be intelligent enough to meet whatever economic problems might arise. He had no dogma save love, and real, hearty good-fellowship.

It also appears that he thought the world was coming straightway to an end; but we must remember that the Gospels have been made up and copied and rewritten and modified to meet the views of the dogmatists that came after him. And whether or not he had such faith in the gospel of love that he believed the world would adopt it sooner than now seems possible with our many degenerates of wealth, of industry, and of ignorance, it is really we who are doing the guessing: he gave no dates. He knew that when this spirit of love and sympathy shall have spread itself over the earth, then the Kingdom of Heaven will be at hand; and it looks to me as though he had this in mind rather than the trumpeting, thunder-clapping, bone-jumping resurrection day of orthodoxy. Granted a reign of love and sympathy and good-fellowship over all the world, and we know that the spirit of Christ will be with us and animate us whether we look at it as mystics or as mechanistic biologists. I postulate that there is no other dogma in the teachings of Jesus.

Now enters Paul. We meet him first as a dogmatist, and a dogmatist he always remained. He appeared as an organizer of orthodox Jews, and he spent the rest of his life in organizing and establishing dogma in Christianity. He seems to have over-estimated the change that came over him on his conversion, for his was the same energetic, impatient and domineering personality afterwards that it was before. He was the very opposite of him he called his master. He had a remarkable gift of expression; as a maker of phrases he was unsurpassed; but while he was scrupulous as to his logic, he was far less admirable in his choice of premises. Indeed he was obsessed by logic. Now logic, without an effective conscience back of it, or even without a generous knowledge of its limitations, is the father of lies. The logician who is careless about the basis of his reasoning maintains a laboratory of error. The shrewd lawyer builds up injustice by a false "theory of the case," as he calls it, and if he is astute enough he makes away with it. We approach the truth by trying out the postulates upon which the conclusions of our day are built, and discarding them when we find them false. Men of science have learned the danger of letting logic run away with them before they know their facts. Formerly it was the fashion among them to work out a theory for every phenomenon and then proceed as though each new theory were a fact. They learned this art from Paul. To-day they are more modest; criticism is invited, whether based on history or experiment.

I repeat, Paul was obsessed by logic. Everything had to be buttoned up, to be made presentable and finished. He had the passion of a Prussian *Feldwebel* for system and order, or of the conscientious housekeeper who throws notes and manuscripts into the fire rather than leave a room untidy. Paul had to work out a theory, a chain of reasoning for everything, and he imposed his findings upon his followers. If he could not get the points of history,—current, ancient and mythological,—which he desired to present as the ground of his argument into a workable relation, he would guess out a law for the situation, and then proceed to argue in favor of his law. And in argument he was irresistible; he could talk anybody down. From statements made in The Acts it appears that he talked constantly.

On his first appearance at the stoning of Stephen the apostles feared him greatly, and when he finally appeared

before them it is doubtful if they would have accepted him as one of their number if Barnabas had not plead for him. And he must have been difficult to get along with. They retained him among them for a year before they let him go out to preach, which was his great desire, and even then they sent him off to the Gentiles rather than have him work among their own people. He had already worked out a series of theories to satisfy his craving for logic, and it would not be surprising if the apostles had hesitated to allow the gospel of love which they had been teaching to become entangled in a complicated code of dogma and rules of Paul's invention. It was Paul who developed the theory that the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, after creating the world in six days and putting Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and observing Adam's disobedience and putting all the children of the earth under the ban of his curse, had then repented of his act and made a sacrifice of Jesus so that the curse might be lifted. Then Paul invented justification by faith, and so justification by faith took the place of love and he had a workable argument, sound in logic, beginning with the Garden of Eden and ending in the escape of his followers from hell-fire. Stand up and say you believe, and you are saved; fail in this opportunity, and you shall go to hell. That was an easy doctrine with which to impress the crowd and bring them into the organization under fear. I do not think Jesus ever taught it. I do not believe he even thought of it as a way to establish what he called the Kingdom of God. On the other hand, how could Paul imagine the Kingdom of God as coming about through sympathy and good-fellowship? He was apparently without good-fellowship, and it is doubtful if he was a man of sympathy. He was too busy "fighting the good fight" to engage in sympathy. Paul's problem was not a problem of love, although this was important because Jesus had so constantly taught it; Paul's problem was one of organization. He wrote wonderful phrases about love, but in practice it had to give way to system and order. And his organization proceeded with great success. As soon as he obtained a good start at his work the other apostles drop out from the pages of the record. They could not get along with him; Barnabas was the first to befriend him and the first to leave him. Mark could not work with him, and Peter was entirely out of accord with him.

The working of Paul's mind is shown in a number of instances. Thus he started with his theory of the church worked out as a Jewish institution, but the rite of circumcision was an hindrance to him in the organization of his establishments. So he returned early in his career to Peter for instruction. Now Peter, who is said to have been of conservative disposition, but who appears, through association with Jesus, to have gathered unto himself some of his loveliness of nature, assured him that the gospel of Jesus was not circumcision or any other rite, but that it was rather of the heart. As soon as Paul learned that circumcision was not essential he substituted baptism for it. He had to have a rule and a rite, so he adopted baptism, which was workable, and thus baptism became essential to salvation. Imagine Jesus saying: "Suffer little children to come unto me—after they have been baptized"!

The problem of sex bothered Paul, and he set forth his dogma that women are a temptation and a danger and therefore they should be kept in the house. He was a man of great influence, and his restrictions upon women have smothered their minds for many centuries.

When he set out on his missionary journeys it was his habit, on his arrival in a town, to seek first the synagogue, and by virtue of his credentials as a preacher, get opportunity to address the Jewish congregation. If they agreed with him and followed him, well and good; if not—the records do not show what happened, but it is evident that there was trouble. When he returned to Jerusalem, before his arrest, it appears that he had already organized his churches into an anti-Jewish institute. I cannot gather any other conclusion from the record. Now the Jews of his day were human, just as they are to-day. Jesus got along with them and loved them. So did Peter and James and John and all the other apostles. Paul could not. He had doctrines which the others did not teach, and it appears to me as though the doctrinaires and teachers of dogma had been blaming the Jews for Paul's faults. Paul is never blamed, and his quarrelsome disposition, his testy temper, and his boastfulness over what he had to endure from those that did not agree with him are referred to as his grand humanity. His habit of speech was not gentle, and it is evident that his expressions to the unpersuaded Jews were neither friendly nor free from insult. Of course the good people would resent

this. Many of us are slow to grasp any new idea; and Paul preached to them, instead of the simple gospel of love which Jesus taught, a new Jewish code, made up largely of rules and deductions of his own invention. The Jewish congregation felt that they had more authority for the laws inscribed on their scrolls than for the doctrines of Paul, and they did what any Christian church would do to-day if anyone were to come to them as Paul went to the synagogues. They plainly told him to clear out. Then Paul, being known as a Christian, could not stone them to death as had been done to Stephen because he did not agree. So he did something far worse than throwing stones at them: he complained that the Jews were persecuting him, and by the persuasiveness of his talk and the volume of it, inflamed the people against the Jews. It was the beginning of the persecution of the Jews, and has continued to this day, remaining one of the most unkind and unchristian features of Christian society. There is bitter cruelty in it. And the higher we go where the graces of life abide in Christian society, the more subtle is this attitude of ungraciousness likely to be toward the Jews. Granted that Christianity might have prevailed without Paul, then we should all have been Jews and the Jews would have been different. They would not have been thrown into ghettos in mediæval days, nor put under a social ban now by inhibitions and prohibitions at the gates of the most delectable social achievements. This attitude of mind comes with the increase of authority of the Church. Jesus leaned the other way. Paul started it.

Another interesting light on the influence of Paul is found in the Reformation. Granted all the evils claimed for the Catholics by the Protestants and the integrity of all of Luther's purposes—and what happened? Luther sought the Scriptures for his inspiration, but it is clear that he dwelt rather upon The Acts and The Epistles than on the gospel of Jesus—and so the fight began. Of Luther's followers, Calvin is a perfect example of one who sought the Scriptures for law, according to Paul, and with no consideration for the Golden Rule. The result was his great and almost successful effort to establish a Presbyterian political machine in Geneva; and while this sets us a shining example of industry, perseverance, singleness of purpose, and that kind of grim resolution that sometimes passes for piety, it does not appeal to the heart. If we were to order our

lives according to Calvin's example we should abide without love or good-fellowship and be lucky if we died of old age at twenty. With all his faults, Paul was better than Calvin. He had a heart. When he saw how Stephen died as a real hero, game to the very last breath, he was impressed. Calvin would have seen red and called for another apostle.

It may be that the apostles, excepting Paul, held it to be better to confine their efforts at first to Jewish people, and from that to grow more slowly but with less accretion of false doctrine. The Christian gospel being one of love, they may have striven to have it grow without hate. Paul's cutting loose from Jewish affiliations and making his churches anti-Jewish was surely not in accord with the teachings of the Master. It may be that these same apostles, whom we find set in the background behind the energetic missionary of his compound of the gospel of Jesus with his own vagrant theories and Hebrew myths, are entitled to more respect and reverence than Paul. Isn't it time to stop robbing Peter to pay Paul? It may be that the gospel of Jesus went over the heads of his disciples and that they spent the end of their days looking for the second coming of Christ; but so did Paul. He was more certain than anybody else that the world was coming to an end straightway. He was the only one that could set the date. And why not give Jesus credit for understanding the men he chose as his companions? He did not choose Paul, but he did choose those simpler men. Did he know that Paul was coming after him to be the nominal communicator of his message to the world? If he did, and thought well of what this human avalanche would say, it seems as though he would have urged his disciples to welcome him and bear with him. But instead of this he cautioned them earnestly against those who should follow in his name, teaching false doctrine. He was very earnest about this. In the end, Paul, by his great strength, astuteness, and force prevailed over the other apostles. And yet, because he prevailed is no guaranty that he was right. If John's allusions to false prophets in the Apocalypse refer to Paul, as they seem to, John's opinion in this matter should be of weight.

In the gospel of love and good-fellowship as the means of bringing about the Kingdom of God, it seems possible that we might agree. Of course, some of us are so crabbed and selfish that our idea of love and good-fellowship is to

have others give us whatever is theirs while we give nothing in return. This is a frequent attitude of the man who boasts of wanting nothing but what is right. But even old skin-flints may become animated by a new spirit if all the rest are full of loving kindness. Jesus knew all this, and how earnestly and how tenderly he sought to tell it! It is so simple, so scientific; and as available to-day as it was two thousand years ago. It is sound psychology—indeed, we can find no fault with it whatever. It requires no abuse of the mind to believe in it. On the other hand, of all the doctrines that Paul and his followers have added on: the virgin birth, the prophecies fulfilled and unfulfilled, justification by faith, vicarious atonement, and the many other articles of faith that in our unbelieving hearts we know are not so: these things seem idle dreams, speculations of a day that is past, speedily vanishing into thin air. Without them, we could all go to church and sing Christmas hymns. With them, the number of Christians must of necessity be limited, grouped by denomination, and according to such dogma as they can bring their minds to endure.

ELLWOOD HENDRICK.